

Can we have a youth group and still be intergenerational?



Suzi Farrant, Young People and Young Adults Development Worker for The Church of Scotland, explores how peer and intergenerational ministry can work together.

A fresh move towards being intergenerational church can feel exciting and inspiring on the one hand while confusing and troubling on the other. We can see the potential in all generations participating in church life together but we wonder where it leaves the children and youth groups that our congregations hold so dear. We can sense God calling us to be more intergenerational but worry about how we can do that while keeping everyone happy and not losing the good things we have. As a youth worker, I've been on my own journey with this, so I know what it feels like.

Over the course of the last decade, I've come to understand that the models we've been using in children and youth ministry have taken us away from the way that God designed church to be. I believe that God is calling us to be intergenerational, and this means flipping the script, flipping the emphasis from doing things apart all the time and only coming together on those special occasions, to a default of being together and only separating things out when really necessary. So, where does this leave our children and youth ministry? Can we have a youth group and still be intergenerational?

In short, my answer is a resounding YES.

It is important to understand that being intergenerational is more of an approach to how we 'do' church than an extra ministry. The culture, theology and values underpinning intergenerational church need to pervade the whole life of your congregation. This isn't just for an hour on a Sunday morning, so it can't be reduced to a programme or a particular ministry. It's also about recognising the inherent worth of all generations and that Christ is present as we relate to one another. **Jesus died and rose again for everyone, and he loves it when we are in relationship with one another.** So being an intergenerational church is about placing the emphasis on what we do together as being about relationship. This means that there is still a place for youth groups (being a young person today is hard and they need to have spaces where they can explore that with their peers), but the wider environment they operate in and the values underpinning them will be a bit different.

Let me explain. Within an intergenerational church, youth groups should be occurring as an addition to gathered worship, so they need to meet at a different time or day. It may be that youth groups won't meet every week, but will meet for certain seasons or perhaps every fortnight. This enables the young people (and the group leaders) to regularly participate in worship with opportunities to build relationships with the whole community, as well as having occasions to explore faith with their peers. It also means that the feeling of belonging a young person has is encouraged to be with the whole church community rather than just the youth group, something that will be vital for their long-term faith formation, particularly as they become too old for youth group.



In an intergenerational church a youth group should be central to the life of a congregation not on the edge of it, and one way to enable this is for the young people to regularly share their stories and prayer needs during gathered worship. This goes for all other church groups too, so that the young people are learning from the stories of others and participating in prayer for others in the congregation and community. Perhaps too, youth group sessions could use the same themes as worship, so that the young people are enabled to bring and explore further the questions and thoughts participating in worship raised for them. The relationship between gathered worship and youth group needs to be symbiotic.

Within an intergenerational church, what a youth group does needs to be built on the same values, so building relationships with each other and God are key. How this is done will vary according to context, but youth groups should be places where young people are enabled to love God and love each other, through the sharing of their lives and their questions together. When we are intentional about curating an intergenerational church community that does life together, from a basis of mutuality, and seeking to be transformed by God, we will find we long to be together across the generations more, with spaces to be together in groups of peers a valuable and integral part of the larger ecosystem.

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Find out more

Consider some passages of scripture from an intergenerational lens to see what insights that brings to the familiar passages. The intergenerational **Insights from the Scriptures webinar** will lead you through doing that.



Read **Being an Intergenerational Church** and consider how the practices explored could be undertaken in your children or youth group.



Think about how you could enable children and young people in your groups to build relationships across the generations through your activities. Be brave and give one of the ideas a try.



Listen to Suzi discussing this topic on the Roots podcast: rootsforchurches.podbean.com

Suzi Farrant is Young People and Young Adults' Development Worker for the Church of Scotland and co-author of Being an Intergenerational Church: Practices to Bring the Generations Back Together (St Andrew Press, 2023)